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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: DAS YAMAMOTO TALKS DEMOCRACY, SOMALIA

WITH DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified By: Charge Vicki Huddleston for reason 1.4 (b,d)

¶11. (C) Summary: Visiting DAS Don Yamamoto told Deputy Foreign Minister Tekeda the GOE had to move faster to strengthen key democratic institutions and to release imprisoned CUD opposition leaders. He and Amb. Huddleston highlighted increasing concern about Ethiopian human rights and democracy at senior levels of the USG and among the U.S. public. Yamamoto pressed for consular access to the detained leaders, but received a cool response from Tekeda. The Deputy Minister said the GOE objected to micromanagement of relations with Ethiopia's opposition. He lamented that the opposition was successfully tarnishing the GOE's image as part of its long-standing, subversive agenda. Tekeda asked for USG understanding as the GOE sought to balance the need to ensure the rule of law and maintain civil order while respecting democratic rights. He said the GOE had no problem "in principle" with the democratic reforms the USG was suggesting; the only differences were over speed and the specifics of implementation. On Somalia, Tekeda agreed with the USG plans to increase support for the TFG process, while pressing TFG President Yusuf to build ties with other actors. Yusuf shared Ethiopia's unwavering commitment to fighting extremism, he added. Tekeda said the GOE believed Somaliland's people should decide whether they wanted independence. He recommended that the USG tell leaders from both Somaliland and the TFG that the U.S. expected them to work out their differences through dialogue. End Summary.

¶12. (C) AF DAS Yamamoto and Charge met over breakfast with Ethiopian State Minister for Foreign Affairs Tekeda Alemu Nov. 28. Director for North American Affairs Grum Abay and Deputy Alayew Mamo joined Tekeda, while AF/RSA rep Col Kenny and PolEcon Counselor Kevin Sullivan also attended for the USG.

Yamamoto, Charge Press for Democratic Reforms

¶13. (C) DAS Yamamoto told Tekeda that both Secretary Rice and President Bush wanted to know what was being done to address the political crisis in Ethiopia. Both had taken notice of Diaspora protests and the reports of the detention of CUD leaders and wanted answers. Yamamoto asked the Deputy FonMin how the country could move forward on democracy and human rights. Tekeda replied that a small group of opposition hard-liners were holding both opposition moderates and society at large hostage. The return of CUD President Hailu Shawel to Ethiopia had been the real blow to the democratic process; the GOE should not be blamed for this. Tekeda asked for USG understanding as the GOE sought to balance the need to ensure the rule of law and maintain civil order while respecting democratic rights. According to Tekeda, the way forward was for CUD MPs to come to Parliament, hopefully along with those leaders not implicated in "crimes." He added that the GOE objected to too much micromanaging by the international community of the GOE's relations with the opposition. Ethiopians must learn to talk to and trust each other, rather than running to outsiders for help. Tekeda lamented that the CUD had been successful in its efforts to tarnish the GOE's international image, which he said formed a key element of the opposition's long-standing strategy to undermine the EPRDF government.

¶14. (C) Yamamoto said that imprisoned CUD leaders would be the biggest challenge for the GOE. Creative solutions would be needed; amnesties linked to medical conditions were one possibility. Col Kenny suggested revising widely criticized changes to the rules of Parliament would be another initiative the GOE could take to defuse the situation. Charge Huddleston agreed, and argued that if the EPRDF had been more willing to build trust with CUD moderates and the general public, the objections of CUD hard-liners like Hailu Shawel could have been overcome. Trust remained a problem, she added. Everyone was waiting for the GOE to follow through on its commitments. Prime Minister Meles had expressed his agreement with reforming Parliamentary rules, opening the media and building capacity at the NEB, but nothing had happened. Tekeda responded that the GOE agreed "in principle" with democratic reforms; the only issue was how and when to implement them.

15. (C) The Charge and DAS Yamamoto pressed Tekeda for access to detained CUD leaders; Yamamoto mentioned that he had brought medication from the U.S. for Hailu Shawel. The Charge noted that a series of major letter-writing campaigns had begun at some of the U.S. most prestigious universities on behalf of the imprisoned members of the opposition. Granting DAS Yamamoto access would allow him to address these concerns more effectively. Yamamoto pointed out that many of the detainees had AmCit family members to whom the USG would have to discuss their cases. While granting the USG access would go beyond Ethiopia's Geneva Convention obligations, it had been done before in other countries. Tekeda answered that he hoped the USG would not insist on this point. Allowing international community access to the detainees would "maintain their illusion" that outsiders could resolve their legal problems. The GOE should be the primary interlocutor for the opposition, not third country representatives.

Somalia: GOE Favors More USG Support for TFG
-- With String Attached

16. (C) DAS Yamamoto briefed Tekeda on U.S. plans for greater engagement on Somalia. The USG was looking for ways to show increased support for the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) while at the same time mitigating President Yusuf's tendency to go it alone, rather than reaching out to potential rivals like the Speaker of the Parliament. The Department had taken an initial step forward by having Washington based officials meet Yusuf in New York on the margins of the UNGA. A next step would be for a USG rep visit to the TFG in Jowhar. Yamamoto underscored that the U.S. continued to believe that the introduction of foreign troops from neighboring countries would be counterproductive. At the same time, the USG was looking for fresh ideas on how to promote stability in Somalia. Yamamoto and Kenny also mentioned stepped up USG efforts to combat Somalia-based pirates in the Indian Ocean.

17. (C) Tekeda agreed that it was important to keep pushing Yusuf to build relations with other actors in Somalia. He noted that while many observers believed Yusuf was "in our pocket," Yusuf had walked out on a meeting with GOE reps. What kept the GOE close to Yusuf was their common commitment to fighting Islamic extremism. Yusuf's determination on that point was absolute, and no amount of money could buy him off. The GOE was working more closely with other regional states to support the TFG, even Egypt, which no longer posed an obstacle to the process. The Deputy Prime Minister said sending a USG representative to Jowhar would send a positive signal -- the principal contribution the USG could make -- and did not appear to have a downside. Tekeda remarked that most Somali leaders had a weakness, including links to drug-trafficking or other illicit activities, in marked contrast to their more responsible counterparts in Hargese.

18. (C) Asked what message Tekeda could carry Jowhar later the same day, Yamamoto requested that the GOE ask Yusuf to act as a national leader, rather than a warlord. He should engage with the Speaker of Parliament and other leaders in Somalia. If he is successful, the USG will engage with him at a higher level.

Somaliland: GOE Agrees Gradual Engagement,
Supports Self-Determination

19. (C) Tekeda told DAS Yamamoto that the GOE sought to maintain honest and transparent relations with both the TFG and Somaliland authorities in Hargese. Ethiopia had no position on the substance of Somaliland's desire for independence from Somalia; the GOE believed that the people of Somaliland should determine their relationship with Somalia. Tekeda added that Somaliland's quest for independence was not a policy driven exclusively by an elite, but rather enjoyed strong grassroots support. He called an AU-organized referendum "one option" for gauging dealing with the issue of independence. The Deputy Minister acknowledged Ethiopians' strong sentimental affinity for the Issacs clan in Somaliland, which had developed strong ties with Ethiopia over the decades. Still, explicit GOE support for independence of Somaliland or early diplomatic recognition of authorities in Hargese would be damaging. The GOE would instead seek to maintain "balance" between the TFG and Somaliland. Tekeda claimed that Somaliland and Puntland would have gone to war several times in recent years had it not been for GOE intervention. In managing the issue of Somaliland, the Deputy Minister suggested that Egypt would not be helpful, but would not be as big an obstacle as in the past, while Kenya was "neither here nor there."

10 (C) Yamamoto indicated that the USG would also be seeking balance in its relations with the TFG and Somaliland authorities. The U.S. would begin with low-level contacts

with Hargeye. Tekeda recommended that as a first step, the USG communicate to both Hargeye and Jowhar its expectation that the two sides would start talking in order to resolve their disagreements through dialogue.

HUDDLESTON